

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL JOHN AGOGLIA, DIRECTOR, COUNTERINSURGENCY TRAINING ACADEMY, COMBINED SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN TIME: 8:30 A.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2008

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STAFF: Okay. We're ready. Colonel Agoglia would like to open just with a brief statement and then he'll take your questions.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): All right, sir. Well, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable. And we're ready when you are, sir.

COL. AGOGLIA: Okay. Thank you very much. As he said, I'm Colonel John Agoglia, the director of the counterinsurgency training center in the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. I'm here on behalf of Major General Robert Cone, the commanding general of CSTC-A.

As you probably know, CSTC-A's responsible for training, development, fielding and mentoring of both the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. There is no doubt that both are fully engaged in leading the fight here.

The ANA are leading over 60 percent of the operations they participate in and have proven themselves an effective fighting force. The ANA is also in the midst of expanding from the current strength of 68,000 to an end strength of 134,000. That's a fairly difficult task, as you can imagine. Last year we trained and added 26,000 soldiers to the ANA and this year we planned to expand the ANA by another 28,000.

The Afghan National Police, as many know, lags behind the Afghan National Army. While we've been training ANA for five years, we picked up the ANP mission just about a year ago. However, I can report that today we have trained over 22,000 police in the last year. That's over a quarter of the force.

All in all, we have made positive strides in fielding professional security forces that are competent, diverse and capable of providing security throughout Afghanistan, but we have a long way to go. And as a result, what my organization, the COIN training center for Afghanistan, does is our focus is to enhance coalition forces, Afghan security forces and other government of the -- of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan agencies' capability to reduce insurgent influence through the delivery of regionally focused, timely and relevant best-practice counterinsurgency training and education that creates greater unity of effort among all the key stakeholders involved in the COIN campaign.

Thanks for attending, and I'm happy to take your questions at this time.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

And Greg, you were first on line. Why don't you get us started.

Q Yeah. Could you just run through some of the numbers again of where things stand currently as far as ANA and ANP, and perhaps where they are currently most engaged, if you will?

MR. HOLT: Okay. In terms of ANA, right now we have -- (audio break) -- thousand assigned, 11,000 in training, and they're authorized to go to 134,000. And we're looking at having that done by 2012. We've trained 26,000 soldiers this year, and we're looking at training 28,000 next year.

in terms of ANP, they have 76,000 assigned, 82,000 authorized, 22(,000) were trained last year, which is over a quarter of the force, and that's the numbers as they stand right now.

Q And where are they -- are they just parceled out all over the country in battalion size, or how are they allocated?

COL. AGOGLIA: There are five corps regions that are broken on out for the ANA corps, and then there are the regional police commands. The corps are (parceled ?) out in terms of the 201st Corps in the Central Region, the 203rd Corps in the RC-East, working with Task Force 101st. The 101st works with both the Central and the East Corps, so the 201st and 203rd Corps. The 205th Corps is working in RC-South with the British and the Canadians and the Dutch down there. The 207th Corps is working in the West with RC-West, which is led by the Italians. And the 209th corps is working in the North with the Germans.

With that being said, the predominance of the forces are in your East and your South, where, in fact, the insurgency is most prevalent.

Q How many are down south? How many ANA, roughly?

COL. AGOGLIA: I don't have it off the top of my head. Sorry.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jason? Q Good morning, sir. I have a question relating to the heroin industry in Afghanistan. I'm always struck by seeing photographs of British or American soldiers wading through poppy fields, and I understand the sensitivity of the whole issue of sustainment crops and whether you burn them, spray them or pay them off to kind of get past this. From a counterinsurgency point of view, could you elaborate on the strategy for how we might see a decrease in the heroin flow that's coming out of Afghanistan and fueling the Taliban's arms there?

COL. AGOGLIA: Yeah. The eradication is an Afghan government program.

And they're working that very effectively, the poppy eradication programs.

They have a number of provinces that are poppy-free, that developed the counter-drug battalion. And that's doing some excellent work in terms of eradication; just yesterday, went about the seizure of a significant amount of

seeds, poppy seeds down in the South, in RC South. I think it was in Helmand province, a significant seizure.

So the Afghan government is working to eradicate poppy and to interdict the heroin trade. Coalition forces again are focused on the insurgent capabilities. And again they support and mentor some of those forces that then go out and execute those missions, as directed by the government of Afghanistan.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Did anybody else join us? Okay.

Well, Greg, any follow-up questions.

Q Yeah, sure.

I wondered if you could talk a little bit about what you're seeing, as far as the enemy forces are concerned, and what their level of operation is, as we go into the winter, kind of what you're seeing particularly in the East and the South.

COL. AGOGLIA: Having just been out there talking -- (off mike) -- you're seeing, the enemy is more sophisticated in their tactics, in terms of how they're setting up the ambushes and how they're doing IEDs, things along those lines.

However they're getting pushed away from the population centers up into the hills. RC East is very concerned that the enemy will be concerned about the progress we're making, in terms of reconstruction and development, our increasing of security forces, and as a result believe that they'll try to sustain their operations throughout the winter.

General Schloesser has talked about that fairly regularly. But again they're seeing that they're trying to stockpile weapons. And there's also news reports coming out, from the Taliban, talking about the fact that they are going to continue the pressure, on the security forces and on the government of Afghanistan, through the winter. And that's one of their objectives.

Whether they're capable of doing that, we'll see. We're prepared to handle that and believe we should be able to turn that back.

Q Do you see much of a buildup down in RC South, around the Kandahar region?

COL. AGOGLIA: I haven't been down there in a bit. So I'm not in a position to answer that right now.

I know they are concerned about it. But to what level their operations have disrupted the ability of them, to stockpile and to reorganize and refit, I'd have to get more up to date on that.

Q You say their tactics are becoming more sophisticated. Would you, could you elaborate a bit perhaps why you think they're getting more sophisticated? Is that just on-the-job training? Or are they learning? Are outside players coming in and teaching them? Or what is your opinion on that?

COL. AGOGLIA: It seems that -- again, talking to the folks at the 101st, they believe it to be foreign fighters coming in and helping the Taliban, training them to be more sophisticated in how they stood up ambushes, the complex ambushes, the ability to hit -- as you move out of it, to get hit again, those sorts of things -- the manner in which they'll use their weapons and use the terrain to match the ability of the coalition forces to fire, maneuver and close with them.

So again, they're getting training from somewhere. And the assumption is they're getting it from the foreign fighters, who are spending the time to train them to be much more effective.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jason.

Q Sure. I've -- let me squeeze in a couple questions here. I am taken every now and then about seeing stories about some -- how we work with our NATO allies there. I know, of course, that the U.S. forces have significantly revamped their counterinsurgency doctrine. Is the NATO -- other countries pretty much in line with the same sense of counterinsurgency doctrine? Are we all singing off the same sheet of music?

COL. AGOGLIA: We're still growing in that area. So what I would tell you is that when I talk to the NATO folks in terms of the OMLT, their military liaison teams that -- their mentoring teams, and when I talk about the training with them, I often ask them to go back and look at what training is going on in their countries, for example, in their stability operations training centers and their stability police training centers, which are training centers focused on what they call stability operation in support of U.N. missions, such as a Chapter VII unilateral intervention by the U.N. And I ask them to try to describe to me what the difference is between that and a counterinsurgency fight.

The goal is to establish governance and rule of law and to protect the people. And whether you're dealing with criminal elements or dealing with insurgent elements, sometimes it's often hard to identify, but there's an awful lot of similarities between the types of fight that we'd describe -- we'd put in neat little boxes -- stability ops, Chapter VII peacekeeping, counterinsurgency. And again, to me, the tactics, techniques and procedures are the same. The goals are very much the same. It's the establishment of governance and rule of law and protecting the population.

When you start talking like that, there seems to be less of a divide between us and them. When you talk strictly in counterinsurgency, yeah, they do have a bit of a reaction to that. But again, if you just start talking about -- (inaudible word) -- of governance, rule of law and protection of the people, they understand that. They know what they need to do. And we're working to help them better mentor the Afghan army in particular on how to fill their role and support the establishment of governance, reconstruction and development and the rule of law.

Q Great. Secretary Rumsfeld used to be a big guy on metrics and trying to establish how far along in the process we were.

Does the counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan have a set of metrics, so to speak, that they use to evaluate progress?

COL. AGOGLIA: We at the -- (audio break) -- training center have put together, you know, a campaign plan for how we're going to provide training to the forces. One of the things we have identified is that we need to do more work on identifying what the metrics are for determining how effective that training is.

So I would dare to say that there are metrics out there that we are working with ISAF, we're working with CSTC-A, we're working with our allies, trying to determine what are the right metrics, what are the right means of measurement. I don't think we're there yet, at this point in time. So again, those hard metrics are still a work in progress at this time.

Q Great. Thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir, and this is Jack, and I've got a question for you, If you could speak a little bit to the progress of the Focused District Development, how is that working overall?

COL. AGOGLIA: (Audio break) -- the Focused District Development, it began in 2007. It's a four-month program with eight weeks of intensive training. The key point is, it's -- when we're done with the intensive training and we're doing the post-training mentoring of the police, we're seeing a 65 percent reduction in local national casualties after the Focused District Development program.

We're also seeing that it is something that is gaining traction with the international community, with ISAF and with UNAMA, because we're -- the realization here is -- that everyone's starting to see is that if you go into win an insurgency you have to do it at the local level, down at the district level. You have to buy time and space for the strategic level to operate by achieving success at the tactical level. And the Focused District Development program provides the promise of doing that.

And it's a program that UNAMA, that ISAF can tie into and support through the partnering -- continued partnering with the police once they're put in place and they've gone through their focused training; the ability to get the ministries of Afghanistan to identify, when you do the assessment, what are the reconstruction development sort of projects you can bring into the district as well; what -- how can you handle an improved governance and rule of law in the area; how can you work between the informal and formal structures of governance to get them to coexist side by side.

So those are the sort of things that are expanding into the Focused District Development program that initially, from CSTC-A's point of view, was focused on development of the police -- UNAMA and ISAF are starting to look at as a program that can start to really get us into -- implementing the comprehensive approach at the right level to affect the people in that district and provide them security, governance and reconstruction development, and within the framework that General McKiernan's put out of shape, clear, hold, build.

So I think it's a great, promising program, it's been a very good program to start, and it can continue to expand and even improve.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir.

Any other follow-up questions?

Q Yeah. Greg here again. I wonder if you could talk a bit about -- in Afghanistan, obviously helicopter support is extremely important. Could you talk a bit about how much lift is available to the ANA and any shortcomings they may have? And are you moving to address any of those needs as far as lift is concerned?

COL. AGOGLIA: Yeah, there are challenges with lift. Nine months ago, NATO flew 90 percent of the missions in support of the Afghan security forces. Today the Afghans fly 90 percent of their own missions, a result of development of the air corps. So the air corps is an example of a successful effort to build a capability for the Afghans.

Do they need more capability? Yes. Helicopters or shortage of helicopters is something that plagues not just the Afghans but also NATO, and it's a critical asset. And in this rugged environment at the altitude, it's pretty hard on the helicopters themselves.

So we're seeing improvement. Is there room for continued improvement? Yes. And it's needed. And the air corps is working on the development plans for increasing the capacity of the ANA.

Q How many helicopters does the air corps have?

COL. AGOGLIA: (Pause.) I'm looking. That's one thing off the top of my head -- all right, I'm looking at a little fact sheet here that says 18 MI-17s, three MI-35s, (some DV ?) lift, and it has AN-32s and AN-26s. So that's the number.

Q We see in press reports back here of kidnappings and such in Kabul city itself. Have you seen a noticeable uptick in that kind of a threat environment inside Kabul?

COL. AGOGLIA: Kidnapping is a terrorist tactic, and it's a tactic that's used to intimidate. If I were an insurgent, I'd be using that tactic. So they're looking at soft targets. They're going after NGOs. They're going after reporters. They're going after the sensational kidnapping pieces. So it's a tactic they're using.

Are they effective? It's something I'm still trying to sort through in my head, because you're hearing about the folks either being sprung by coalition operations and/or then the other side is they're being paid ransom. So again -- the other part is determining is it the insurgents, is it the criminal element, and the idea or the perception, well, it really doesn't matter, they're trying to project that in fact Kabul is not secure.

I think Kabul is very secure.

I think they're more isolated incidents, and I think it's a directed strategy by the ANA -- I mean -- I'm sorry -- by the insurgents to discredit the transition of lead security to the ANA and ANP for Kabul.

We'll have to see, as time goes on. I believe the ANA, ANP are workforce very hard to combat that and protect it. But at the same time, the people in the streets who are identified as soft targets -- i.e., foreign

nationals -- need to understand that they are in fact a target and need to start taking the necessary precautions, you know, in terms of varying their routes, making sure they're not as openly obvious, walking around unprotected. So again, it's a two-way street. It's what the ANA and ANP can do, but it's also what the people who are being identified as targets do to protect themselves.

Again, if you want to do a kidnaping operation in New York City, you could probably get away with it fairly easily. If -- you know, the mob used to do that. I knew that growing up in New York.

So again, to what degree are they being successful -- they're having some intimidating effect upon the press and upon the NGOs, but I haven't seen it stopping the press or the NGOs from operating yet.

Q And one last quick question: The more sophisticated insurgent attacks you're seeing -- is that part of the Hezb-i-Islami group? Is that Hekmatyar's group? Would you say that you're seeing that sophistication, or is that across the Taliban?

COL. AGOGLIA: Huh, good question. You know, I don't know. I'd have to go back and check. I'd be speculating to tell you if it was any one particular group. My gut tells me you're seeing an increase across the different groups, but I can't say one over the other very well. So I'd have to go back and check on that for you.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right. And well, Colonel, do you have any closing remarks for us?

COL. AGOGLIA: No, that was -- guys, you were easy.

MR. HOLT: (Chuckles.)

COL. AGOGLIA: So -- (audio break). (Chuckles.) Hey, I just want to say thanks and thank you for helping us tell the military's story. We've made a lot of advances here, and counterinsurgency is certainly an area where we've made much progress. We've got a lot of progress to continue to make. There's a lot of areas for improvement. But I think we have the right people, the right forces, and we're starting to get all the pieces in place for us to continue seeing a surge forward in defeating this insurgency and improving the capability of the ANSF and coalition forces' operation, and strengthening the government of Afghanistan. So I'm very optimistic. While you hear in the press that the Taliban is resurging, I'm fairly confident that we are putting ourselves in a position where we'll be able to handle that and we'll see a lot more good news in the upcoming campaign.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

And Colonel John Agoglia is just director of the counterinsurgency training center at Afghanistan. Thank you very much for being with us today, sir, and I am hoping we can have you back, we can talk again.

COL. AGOGLIA: Yes, I look forward to it. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir.

Q Thanks .

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